



Working Lands Alliance
A Project of American Farmland Trust

Date: February 23, 2011

To: Environment Committee

Testimony in Support of: **H.B. 5376: AN ACT AUTHORIZING THE ISSUANCE OF BONDS FOR THE COMMUNITY FARMS PROGRAM**

Submitted by: Ben Bowell, Acting Project Director, Working Lands Alliance

The following testimony is submitted on behalf of the Working Lands Alliance, a statewide coalition of caring individuals and more than 200 organizations and businesses working together to raise awareness of the need and importance of saving Connecticut's valuable and vanishing farmland.

The authorization of bond funding for the Community Farms Preservation Program is a top legislative priority of the Working Lands Alliance and we strongly support HB 5376.

Connecticut's community and small farms play a key role in forming the character and history of our towns and bringing local food from the state's rich soil to our plates. Members of the Working Lands Alliance believe strongly that they are worth the state's investment in their preservation and worked to create the Community Farm Preservation Program in 2008. *Unfortunately, the program has not yet been funded.*

The main Farmland Preservation Program was established in 1979 with a focus on preserving farmland for future food production capacity as well as contributing to the agricultural sector. Since that time, the agriculture sector has changed dramatically. Interest in local food and community access to local agriculture has increased interest in food production capacity on small as well as large parcels of farmland. Agriculture businesses are also demonstrating capacity to function on relatively smaller parcels compared to decades ago. Today 64% of Connecticut's farms are less than 50 acres.

The new program was created to protect farms that are important to a community, but do not qualify for the Farmland Preservation Program, often because they are too small (less than 30 acre threshold) or not in a cluster of farmland. Many provide ideal conditions for access to local agriculture for large populations. These types of farms are highly valued by communities seeking to maintain a connection to agriculture activity and its historical contribution to town character.

The Community Farms Program is ready to start protecting farms. As required by statute, a Sub-Committee of the Farmland Preservation Advisory Board worked with staff from the

Department of Agriculture and has created scoring criteria. *The program needs \$1 million per year in FY 2012 and FY 2013 to begin protecting these valuable resources.*

H.B. 5376 would create bond authorization separate from bond funding for the Farmland Preservation Program. There is an overwhelming demand for the Farmland Preservation Program and preservation of community farms should not be at the expense of or in competition with protection of larger parcels.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee on this important issue. The Working Lands Alliance is strongly supportive of HB 5376 and urges your support.